

Ham radio operators share their passion

Annual Field Day dials in hobby's local enthusiasts

BY CINDY HODGSON

Herald Times Reporter

MANITOWOC — Rich Weyer took a "Ham Cram" course offered by the ManCoRad Radio Club in April. After the intensive one-day course and an exam, he became a licensed amateur radio operator.

On Saturday, Weyer was at Silver Creek Park participating in Field Day, an annual public demonstration of amateur radio, also called ham radio.

"This is my first Field Day," said Weyer, who is from Sheboygan Falls. "I've been asking a lot of questions and learning a lot."

Weyer said he'd always wanted to get into ham radio, and finally this spring he did.

"There's just so much you can do with amateur radio that it just kind of boggles the mind," he said.

Weyer and the others who gathered for the local Field Day, part of Amateur Radio Week, were among an estimated 30,000 people participating across the country, according to Steve Weinert, education coordinator for the ManCoRad Radio Club.

ManCoRad stands for Manitowoc County Radio, and most of the 80-plus members of the club are from Manitowoc County, Weinert said.

There are multiple objectives behind Field Day, which actually is held during two days, ending at noon today, according to Weinert.

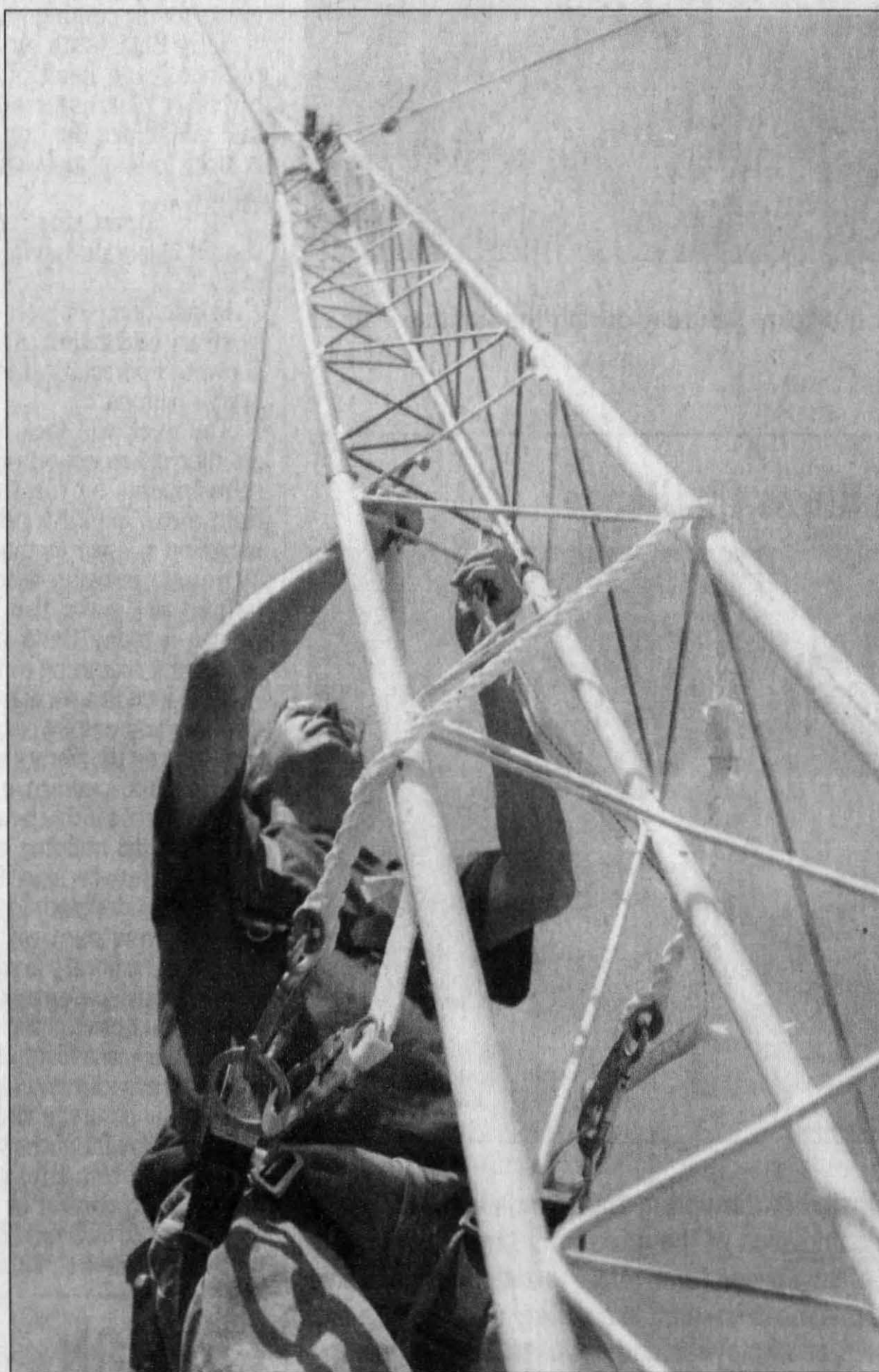
It is a time for ham radio operators to set up their equipment and ensure it's working in case it is needed in an emergency.

"This is a fun way of doing a preparedness drill," Weinert said.

The event also is a chance for club members and their families to operate the club's equipment. Finally, it's a way to educate the public about amateur radio clubs.

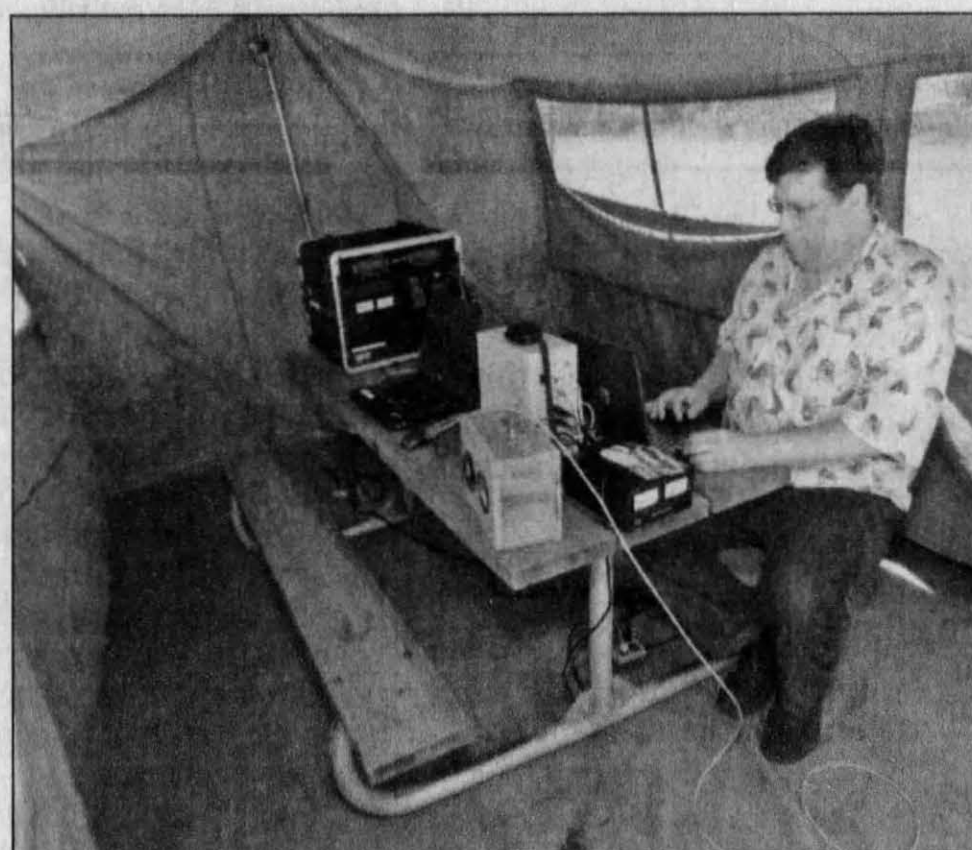
Weinert said more than 100 people typically stop by during the weekend. Some are people who notice the crane hoisting antennas more than 100 feet high, and even people playing disc golf at the park may come over to see what's happening, he said.

Those who stop by can talk with the ham radio operators and watch demonstrations of traditional Morse code, voice communications, digital (typed) communications, and an advanced type of digital communications that connects with the Internet, making e-mail possible even if local Internet service is unavailable.



Photos by Eric Young/HTR

Bob Marheine of Manitowoc wears a full climbing rig as he ascends a tower holding the antennae for a high frequency amateur radio Saturday at Silver Creek Park, Manitowoc.



Steve Weinert of Manitowoc uses a laptop and a high frequency amateur radio to communicate with other club members around the world Saturday during a "Field Day," affiliated with the American Radio Relay League.

PASSION

From A1

"It would be like the Internet never went down," said John Meyer of Menchalville, a member of the ManCoRad Radio Club for 20 years.

The ability to help in an emergency by providing backup communications is one aspect of the hobby that appeals to ham radio operators.

"We're serving the community," said Mary Langer, who was there with her husband, Ken. The Langers are from Norman, which is in Kewaunee County.

ManCoRad members have assisted with communication during weather emergencies, according to Weinert, including riding in squad cars after lightning damaged police communications equipment.

Another appeal of ham radio is the opportunity to talk with people around the world.

"From my little home station, I've talked to over 200 radio countries around the world," Weinert said. He specified "radio countries" because

each radio entity is not necessarily one country.

Communication can be as simple as making contact or it can become a whole conversation, according to Weinert. For example, he spent about 45 minutes talking with someone from New Zealand.

"You meet friends all over the world," Meyer said.

He became friends with a man from Sri Lanka. The two visited each other's countries, and now the friend's son is attending the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay — all because Meyer is a "ham."

One objective of Field Day is to see how many contacts can be made. Last year, the local club contacted nearly every part of the United States as well as Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, South America, Europe and Africa, according to an e-mail from Weinert.

He said people participating in Field Day would try to make contact with the space station Saturday night. He thought they would be able to hear people on the space station but probably wouldn't be able to talk to anyone there.